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Investigations into the 1985 Migratory Game Bird Season The Pas, Manitoba

By Warren T. Toderan

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INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE 1985 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON

THE PAS, MANITOBA

Submitted by

Warren T. Toderan

For The Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Biological Services MS Report No. 86-02

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Investigations into the migratory game bird season in The Pas area, Manitoba.

Department of Natural Resources
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ABSTRACT

Waterfowl hunter bag checks and interviews were carried out during the 1985 migratory game bird season (September 9 - October 14, 1985) in The Pas area. Landowners, motel owners and lodge owners in the survey area also were interviewed and their comments regarding the migratory game bird season were recorded. It was determined through 127 interviews involving 353 hunters that 52% (185 hunters) were non-Canadian hunters who spent an average of 2.2 hours per day to bag 2.8 ducks and 0.26 geese. The remaining 48% (168 hunters) were resident hunters who spent 1.89 hours per day to bag 0.36 ducks and 0.22 geese. Lesser scaup (42%) and mallards (24%) formed the majority of the bag for ducks, while Canada geese comprised (96%) of the total goose bag. A total of 174 non-Canadian hunters were registered at lodges and hotels/motels, an average of 7 days in an average party size of 3.3. The major concern of hunters and motel/lodge owners was daily bag and possession limits for ducks. Other important concerns were low duck populations (21 responses) and high licence fees (13 responses).

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INTRODUCTION

The Pas area, most importantly the Saskeram Marsh Wildlife Management Area and surrounding areas, has been traditionally an important breeding and fall staging area for waterfowl. In 1962, Ducks Unlimited (Canada) was granted a 21 year lease (extended 10 years in 1983) in the Saskeram W.M.A. to regulate water levels to improve waterfowl habitat. Through a provincial agreement, the Root/Reader Lake area also has been set aside for Ducks Unlimited (Canada) to manage/regulate water levels for waterfowl (1985 personal comm., R. Uchtmann)[1].

The Pas area is an important hunting area for non-resident and resident waterfowl hunters. Areas such as the Carrot River Valley and Root/Reader and Kelsey Lakes are some of the most popular hunting areas (Figure 1).

As a result of declining duck populations, resident hunters in The Pas area have been faced with duck bag limit reductions from eight daily (maximum 8 mallards) in 1984 to six daily (maximum 2 mallards) in 1985. Non-resident hunter limits were also reduced from five daily (maximum 3 mallards and not more than 2 daily may be canvasback/redhead and/or combination of the two species) in 1984 to five daily (maximum 2 mallards and not more than 2 daily may be canvasback/redhead and/or combination of the two species) in 1985.

As part of an ongoing Provincial program directed at collecting information on waterfowl seasons and hunters, a two part study involving hunter interviews and landowner/lodge/motel owner concerns were conducted in The Pas area during the 1985 waterfowl hunting season (September - October), 1985.

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[1] R.H. Uchtmann, Marsh Manager, Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, The Pas.

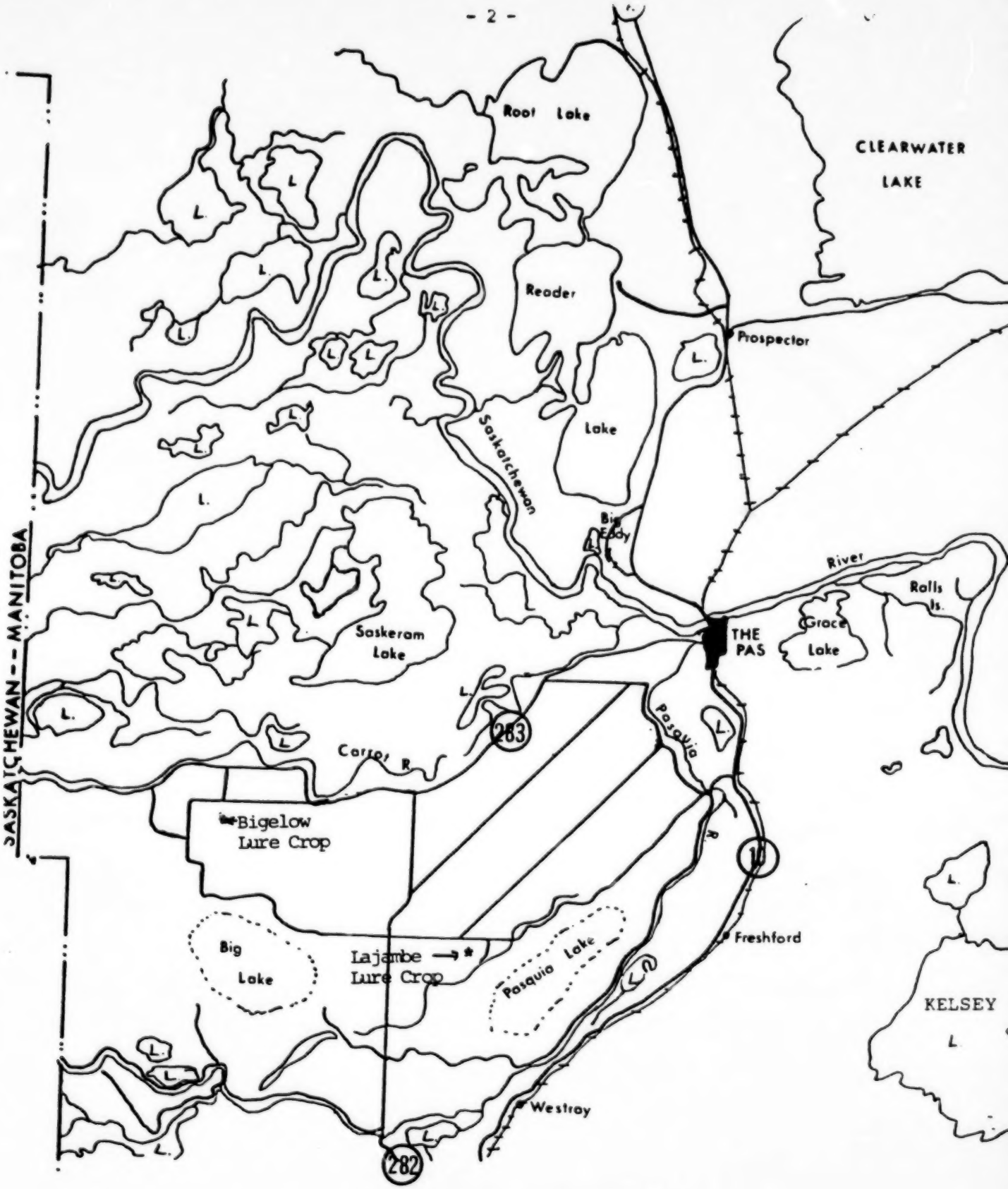


Figure 1. Waterfowl hunting areas near The Pas, Manitoba

The objectives of the study were to:

1) determine the Canadian and non-Canadian use of the resource and the commercial facilities in The Pas area
2) determine concerns of waterfowl hunters and commercial operators who provide accommodation to hunters.

METHODS

Hunter interviews and bag checks were conducted in The Pas area during the 1985 hunting season, September 9 to October 14. Lodge owner and motel owner interviews also were conducted.

Hunters were interviewed and their comments recorded on interview sheets (Appendix, Page 25). Waterfowl were identified by species, aged, sexed, and data recorded. All information and comments were given voluntarily. Some non-resident interviews were conducted at motels and lodges. Prior to the start of the season, motel owners and lodge owners were provided with record books to record hunter length of stay, number of hunters, and total number of birds harvested (Appendix, Page 26). Information on hunter vehicle activity also was monitored during the waterfowl season to determine key hunting areas. Landowners and motel/lodge owners were interviewed towards the end of the hunting season to record their concerns and comments on the 1985 waterfowl hunting season.

RESULTS

A total of 112 non-Canadian hunters were registered at lodges and 62 were at hotels or motels. An additional 40 non-Canadian hunters interviewed stayed in private cabins, private homes, and camped at commercial campgrounds

or close to hunting areas. The average length of stay at lodges was 6.5 days and the average party size was 3.5. Thirty-three percent of the parties registered at lodges used guides during their hunt. Guides were used only by hunters registered at lodges.

The length of stay varied from 1 to 14 days. One hundred and seventy-four non-Canadian hunters stayed at a commercial accommodation facility an average of 7 days and were in a party size of 3.3. Thirty-eight hunters who provided their own accommodation stayed an average of 8.9 days and were in an average party size of 2.9 (Table 1). Ninety-eight percent of the non-Canadian hunters interviewed hunted in The Pas area in previous years. Most have hunted between one and five years (Table 2).

The commercial accommodations available in The Pas area were used very little by Canadian hunters. Only 1 party of 4 stayed in a motel for 1 night (Table 3).

Non-Canadians spent 83 percent of their hunting effort in marshes on crown land while Canadians spent 68 percent of their time in private grain fields within the Carrot River Valley (Table 4). Non-Canadians appeared to prefer to hunt in crown land areas to avoid conflicts with landowners and to take advantage of over water hunting opportunities.

Resident Canadians as well as non-Canadians hunt in other areas of Manitoba. All responses to this question during the interviews were treated as individual responses rather than being a response from the group (Table 5).

TABLE 1. Non-Canadian accommodation, average party size, total number of hunters, average length of stay and guides used.

ACCOMMODATION	AVERAGE PARTY SIZE	TOTAL NUMBER HUNTERS	AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY		GUIDES USED
			PARTY	HUNTER	
Carpenter's Lodge	4.6	56	8.6	7.5	1
Evergreen Lodge	2.6	16	3.8	4.1	6
Vickery Lodge	2.9	32	6.0	6.0	4
M & M Cabins	2.5	23	6.8	6.5	-
Laverendrye Motel	2.4	12	5.4	5.7	-
Golden Arrow Motel	2.3	7	1.3	1.2	-
Tamarack Motel	1.5	3	8.0	8.0	-
Rupert House Hotel	12.0	12	14.0	14.0	-
Kum Bac Cabins	4.0	8	6.0	6.0	-
Wanless (Forest Grove)	5.0	5	14.0	14.0	-
Private cabin	2.5	10	14.0	14.0	-
Private home	3.0	6	8.0	6.0	-
Camping *	2.7	24	6.9	6.2	-

*Two hunters (2 parties) did not indicate length of stay.

TABLE 2. Years hunted in The Pas area by non-Canadians, based on 54 individual interviews.

	Years Hunted														
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	15	20	21
Hunter Numbers	1	5	7	9	7	10	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	2	1

TABLE 3. Manitoba resident hunter accommodation and residency.

Origin	Number Hunters	Percentage	Accommodation
The Pas	88	62.9	The Pas
Flin Flon	26	18.6	Motel(4), club house(7) hunting camp(10)
Swan River	4	2.9	Private cabin(4)
Winnipeg	4	2.9	Club house(3), hunting camp(1)
Thompson	9	6.5	Private home(2), hunting camp(7)
Brandon	4	2.9	Private home(4)
Dauphin	2	1.5	Camper(2)
Cormorant	2	1.5	Tent(2)
Virden	1	0.8	Private home(1)

TABLE 4. Canadian and non-Canadian hunting effort in The Pas area.

Hunter	Marsh	Field	Both
Canadian	32 %	61 %	7 %
Non-Canadian	83 %	12 %	5 %

TABLE 5. Areas hunted elsewhere in Manitoba by Canadians and non-Canadians.

LOCATION	NUMBER OF HUNTERS	
	Canadian	Non-Canadian
Whitewater		9
Oak Lake	4	8
Delta, Netley		7
Dauphin, Whitewater		6
Dauphin	3	
Winnipegosis	6	3
Lundar		5
Swan River	6	
Brandon	3	
Erickson		3
Boissevain, Ashern		3
Interlake	3	
Birch River	2	
Virden	2	
Plumas	2	
The Narrows		2
Churchill		2
Churchill, Ashern, Lundar		1
Souris		1
Grand Rapids		1
Norway House	1	

During the 1985 waterfowl season, a total of 353 hunters were interviewed during 127 interviews. Residents of Manitoba comprised 48.0% (168) of those interviewed while non-Canadians represented 52.0% (185). Of the non-Canadian hunters interviewed, 30.0% were from Wisconsin, 23.0% from Minnesota, 14.0% from Illinois, and the remaining 33.0% were from 9 other states (Table 6). Sixty-three percent of resident hunters were from The Pas area. Flin Flon residents comprised 18.6 percent of the resident hunter component of the population while the remaining 19 percent were from 7 other Manitoba locations (Table 3).

Two hundred and eighty-one individual waterfowl hunter vehicles were observed for an average of 9.7 hunter vehicles per day. From total hunter interviews and vehicles recorded, 54 of these hunter vehicles were observed more than once during the survey period.

Lesser scaup *(Aythya affinis)* (42%) and mallard *(Anas platyhrynchos platyhrynchos)* (24%) formed the largest portion of the species composition for ducks, and canada geese *(Branta canadensis)* (96%) formed the majority of the bag limits for geese. Sixty-one percent of the lesser scaup bagged were adults (Table 7).

The survey results indicated that only 13% of resident hunters as compared to 33% of the non-Canadian hunters planned to hunt again that day.

Hunter bag checks revealed that resident hunters spent an average of 1.89 hours/day to bag 0.36 ducks and 0.22 geese as compared to non-Canadian hunters who spent an average of 2.2 hours/day to bag 2.8 ducks and 0.26 geese.

TABLE 6. Residency of American hunters interviewed in The Pas area, 1985.

STATE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Wisconsin	17	29.8
Minnesota	13	22.8
Illinois	8	14.0
Michigan	5	8.7
Pennsylvania	4	7.0
Iowa	2	3.5
Kentucky	2	3.5
Georgia	2	3.5
Arkansas	1	1.8
Ohio	1	1.8
Indiana	1	1.8
South Dakota	1	1.8
	57	100

TABLE 7. Species composition and age class of waterfowl checked in The Pas area, 1985.

Species	AGE			Total	Percent
	Immature	Adult	Unknown*		
Ducks					
Mallard	25	28	92	145	24
Gadwall	1	2	10	13	2
Wigeon	6	1	6	13	2
Green-winged teal	6	-	16	22	4
Blue-winged teal	9	6	19	34	6
Northern shoveler	-	-	4	4	-
American pintail	15	2	25	42	7
Redhead	4	-	5	9	1
Canvasback	10	4	35	49	8
Lesser scaup	18	61	176	255	42
Goldeneye	2	1	3	6	1
Bufflehead	-	7	-	7	1
Coot	-	-	8	8	1
Unknown	-	-	605	605	-
Geese					
Snow goose	-	-	3	3	3
Canada goose	26	20	41	87	96
Ross goose	1	-	-	1	1
Unknown	-	-	41	41	-

*High numbers of unknown birds can be attributed to birds cleaned prior to interview.

Hunter vehicle activity observed during the survey showed that the Root/Reader Lake area and the area adjacent to the two Carrot Valley lure crops received the most hunting pressure (Table 8).

Most resident and non-Canadian hunters were satisfied with the season framework. The major concern was for the low daily and possession duck limits (39 responses - 21 non-Canadian, 18 resident), declining duck populations (17 responses - 10 non-Canadian, 7 resident), and high licence fees (12 responses - 8 non-Canadian, 4 resident). Nine resident hunters thought lure crops attract ducks from other potential good hunting areas. Non-Canadian hunters (6 of 9) were concerned with having to go to different vendors to purchase both provincial and federal waterfowl licences. Resident hunters mentioned that permission to hunt on private land was hard to obtain. Non-Canadian hunter comments are found in Table 9 and resident hunter comments are shown in Table 10.

Some resident hunters (8 responses) liked the idea of lower duck limits to help raise the duck populations (Table 11). Non-Canadians (33 responses) indicated that The Pas area provided better hunting and viewing opportunities than experienced elsewhere. The aesthetics of the country and solitude of hunting (20 responses) and an earlier waterfowl hunting season (10 responses) were the favourable remarks of the non-Canadian hunters (Table 12).

Eight landowners were interviewed. Five (63%) indicated they allow hunters on their land. Three of the landowners indicated they hunt themselves. Their major concerns were trespassing (4 responses) and the need for more enforcement (4 responses). (Table 13).

TABLE 8. Concentration of hunter vehicle activity, The Pas area, 1985.

Location*	Number of Vehicles
Root/Reader Lake (includes Kelsey, Landry Lakes)	78 (32%)
Big Lake (includes Diversion Dam)	56 (23%)
Pasquia River Road	29 (12%)
Bigelow Lure Crop	27 (11%)
Lajambe Lure Crop (includes W. Pasquia Lake Drainage)	24 (10%)
Community Pasture	8 (4%)
Freshford Lake	7 (3%)
Carrot River	6 (2%)
Big Eddy (includes Watchi Lake)	3 (1%)
Grace Lake	2 (1%)
Ralls Island	2 (1%)

*Refer to Figure 1 for map of area.

TABLE 9. Manitoba resident hunter concerns from bag check/interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Concern and/or Suggestion	Number of Hunters Responding
1. Limits are too low	18
2. No concerns	13
3. Lure crops attract ducks from other potential hunting areas	9
4. Duck numbers are decreasing	7
5. Permission to hunt on private land hard to obtain	7
6. Ducks Unlimited is flooding too much land	6
7. Too many U.S. hunters	5
8. Licence fees are too high	4
9. Hunting is expensive	3
10. Can't buy all parts of licence at one vendor	3
11. Designated routes should be better marked	2
12. Should have equal licence fees in other provinces	2
13. Limits should be universally set between U.S. and Canada	2
14. Should improve hunter ethics	2
15. Set-up lure crop area for hunting	2
16. Later hunting season	2
17. Increase non-resident fees	2
18. Unable to hunt on Sunday	1
19. Earlier crane season	1
20. Lure crops should be properly signed	1
21. Need more enforcement	1
22. Encourage better hunter/landowner relationships	1
23. Seasons are too early	1
24. Should have more access into Saskeram Marsh	1
25. Don't agree with Federal Duck Habitat stamp	1

TABLE 10. Non-Canadian hunter concerns from bag check/interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Concern and/or Suggestion	Number of Hunters Responding
1. Limits are too low	21
2. Duck numbers are decreasing	10
3. No concerns	9
4. Licence fees are too high	8
5. Can't buy all parts of licence at one vendor	6
6. More access in some areas	3
7. Unable to hunt on Sunday	3
8. Should improve hunter ethics	2
9. Limits too high for resident	2
10. Hard to obtain permission to hunt on private land	2
11. Hunting is very expensive	2
12. Draining of Big Lake for agriculture	2
13. Opening day should be the same as resident	1
14. Point system should be initiated	1
15. Resident hunters should have higher limits	1
16. Better information for hunting locations	1
17. Duck habitat is declining	1
18. Use of buckshot shot not be disallowed	1
19. Need more enforcement	1
20. Encourage better hunter/landowner relationships	1
21. Close season to re-build duck populations	1

TABLE 11. Resident hunter remarks from bag check/interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Remarks	Number of Hunters Responding
Approve lower duck bag limits to raise populations	8
Like idea of Federal Duck Habitat stamp	2
Farmers are most co-operative	2
Nice that senior citizens only need to buy Federal permit	1
Feeder stations in Saskeram Marsh would be beneficial	1

TABLE 12. Non-Canadian hunter remarks from bag check/interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Remarks	Number of Hunters Responding
Better hunting in The Pas area; see more birds	33
Enjoy aesthetics of country and solitude of hunting	20
Would like earlier season opening	10
Bag limit is acceptable	5
Appreciate areas where hunters can shoot/see canvasbacks	2
Hunting expense similar to U.S.	2
Like idea of Federal Duck Habitat stamp	1
Ducks Unlimited has done great work	1

TABLE 13. Landowner comments and concerns from interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Comments/Concerns	Number Responding
1. Trespassing	4
2. More enforcement needed	4
3. Not filling in pits	2
4. Use land for own hunting purposes	2
5. Like idea of bait stations	2
6. ATC use in fields	1
7. Roads torn up by hunters	1
8. Swaths trampled by hunters	1
9. Dangerous shooting	1
10. Not as many hunters as past years	1

Based on interviews with 7 lodge/motel owners, their major concerns were too low a bag limit, decrease in duck numbers and a decrease in business. These three concerns drew 4 responses for each. Two owners felt the non-Canadian season should be earlier (Table 14).

DISCUSSION

Approximately two-thirds of the hunting parties hunting in The Pas area during the survey period were interviewed (based on hunter vehicle observations). A total of 281 individual hunter vehicles were recorded.

Interview results indicated a major concern for the low duck limit and the decrease in the duck population. Business representatives are concerned that non-Canadian hunter numbers are lower than usual and an important contribution to the local economy is being lost. The decrease in non-Canadian hunters coming to The Pas may be directly attributed to a low duck population and low bag limits.

It was found that non-Canadian hunters spent more time in the field hunting and had enjoyed better success than resident hunters. Non-Canadian hunters were better equipped with dogs, decoys, etc.

> "It becomes very difficult for the local hunter to compete without going to great expense and effort to obtain an equal amount of hunting equipment as his U.S. counterpart. The average Manitoba resident spends less than seven days hunting during the season and finds it difficult to invest large amounts of money in decoys and 10 gauge shotguns in order to out-do the non-resident hunters in the neighbouring field." (M. Gillespie, 1984)

TABLE 14. Motel/lodge owners' comments and concerns from interviews, The Pas area, 1985.

Comments/Concerns	Number Responding
1. Limits are too low	4
2. Duck numbers are decreasing	4
3. Business is slower than usual	4
4. Non-Canadian season opens too late	2
5. Bag limits are acceptable	2
6. All non-resident hunters should have registered guides	1
7. Licence fees are too high	1
8. Hard to obtain permission to hunt on private land	1
9. Expensive to hunt	1
10. Lure crops attract ducks from other potential hunting areas	1
11. Too much garbage at Reader Lake	1

While being interviewed, some of the non-resident hunters stated that if limits go any lower, it would not be worthwhile for them to return to The Pas area. A majority of the non-Canadian hunters said that despite seeing a good number of waterfowl, they understood and believed that duck populations are decreasing. Most hope or agree that the limits, although low, may be the answer to helping the declining duck population. Slightly less than half of non-resident hunters interviewed remarked that the reason for coming this far to hunt waterfowl was because of the "solitude" of the hunting and would return to The Pas area next year despite bag limits.

The business representatives noted a general slowing in bookings and enquiries this year as compared to other years. Most motel/lodge owners believe that if the limits go any lower, their business will be negatively affected. Some concern was expressed for the later hunting dates for non-resident hunters. Some businesses reported that some of the hunters that lodged with them have booked for next year's hunt. Carpenter's Clearwater Lodge reported a 100% return on bookings for the 1986 season from non-resident hunters.

Landowner concerns were of trespassing and of poor hunter ethics. They realized that hunters helped to disperse waterfowl that are depredating their crops. Enforcement was another major concern by landowners. They mentioned that more effort is needed to protect them against hunters who trespass and break the law. There was a concern for hunting in the lure crops or too close to them. Better signage and designation in the hunting brochure of the lure crop area was suggested.

Most non-Canadian hunter pressure was in the Root/Reader lake area while most resident hunter activity was associated with the two lure crops. Most of the birds checked were shot in these areas. It is evident that a large number of unknown waterfowl was recorded during the survey. When interviews were held at lodges or motels, most birds were dressed and cleaned. Wings were the only identifiable part of the bird left over. Lodge and motel owners also recorded large numbers of 'unknown' species of birds. This was usually recorded by the owners as the hunters checked out.

Lodges catered to 52% of the non-Canadian hunters and motels/hotels 29%. The remaining 19% stayed in private homes, cabins or camped. An increase in income to the business community will only be accomplished by increasing the bag limit and opening the non-Canadian season one week earlier.

Very few (16%) of the non-Canadian hunters use guides. Two of the three lodges in The Pas provide guides. The assistance of a guide does not appear to be the answer to success. This is apparent in the hunter harvest records kept by Carpenter's Lodge. Carpenter's do not provide guides, yet their guests show 80 to 100% success rates. The actual number of birds taken by hunters who stayed at Carpenter's is not shown, instead, percentage of limits mark the success of the hunter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That studies of this nature be conducted every 2 - 3 years to determine changes in waterfowl harvest and hunter attitudes.

2. That future waterfowl season changes be influenced by potential effects on hunter numbers and economic opportunities.

3. That a hunter ethics program be implemented to improve landowner/hunter relationships.

4. That the Department of Natural Resources review the enforcement effort in The Pas agricultural area.

5. That in future studies, questionnaire sheets may be handed out to motel/lodge owners to be passed on to hunters to complete at their leisure. These forms may allow researchers to efficiently survey a larger portion of the hunter population.

REFERENCES

Gillespie, Murray M. 1984. Investigations into the migratory bird season, Whitewater Lake, Manitoba. Resour. Publ. MS 84-2, Manitoba Dept. of Nat. Res. 20 pp.

APPENDICES

INTERVIEW TYPE: Individual _____ DATE: _____ PARTY NO. _____

Group _____ TIME: _____

WHAT is the name of the area where you hunted?

_____

How many hunters were in your party? _____

What type of hunting did you practice?

Marsh _____

Field _____

Did you use a registered guide? Yes ___ No ___

Did you hunt on private land? _____

on public land? _____

Did you have any difficulty gaining permission to hunt on private land? Yes ____ No ____

What hours did you hunt today? _____

Do you plan to hunt any more today? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, waterfowl _____ Grouse _____

How many birds did you shoot and retrieve?

Ducks _____ Geese _____

SPECIES	ADULT	IMMATURE

Interviewer Comments _____

_____

_____

Resident of Manitoba: _____

Nearest town to where you live: _____

Non-resident of Manitoba: _____

Province _____

State _____

How many years have you hunted in this area? _____

Do you hunt in other areas of the province?

Yes ____ No ____ Area _____

Where are you staying while hunting in this area?

_____

Have you been checked by a Resource Officer? ___

Do you have any concerns about hunting?

Season framework _____ Fees _____

Populations _____ Access _____

Bag limit _____ Other _____

Enforcement _____

Non-residents _____

Residents _____

Accommodations _____

Any comments (suggestions, changes, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

WATERFOWL HUNTER INFORMATION

YEAR 1985

D.N.R. Party No.	Party Name and Address	# in Party	Registration Dates	Guide Supplied	Total Harvest Ducks	Geese	Remarks

HUNTER ACTIVITY

DATE	TIME	VEHICLE & LIC.	NO. HUNTER	INTERVIEW	COMMENTS

TRIP SHEET

DATE:

WEATHER:

HUNTING CONDITION:

HUNTER ACTIVITY:

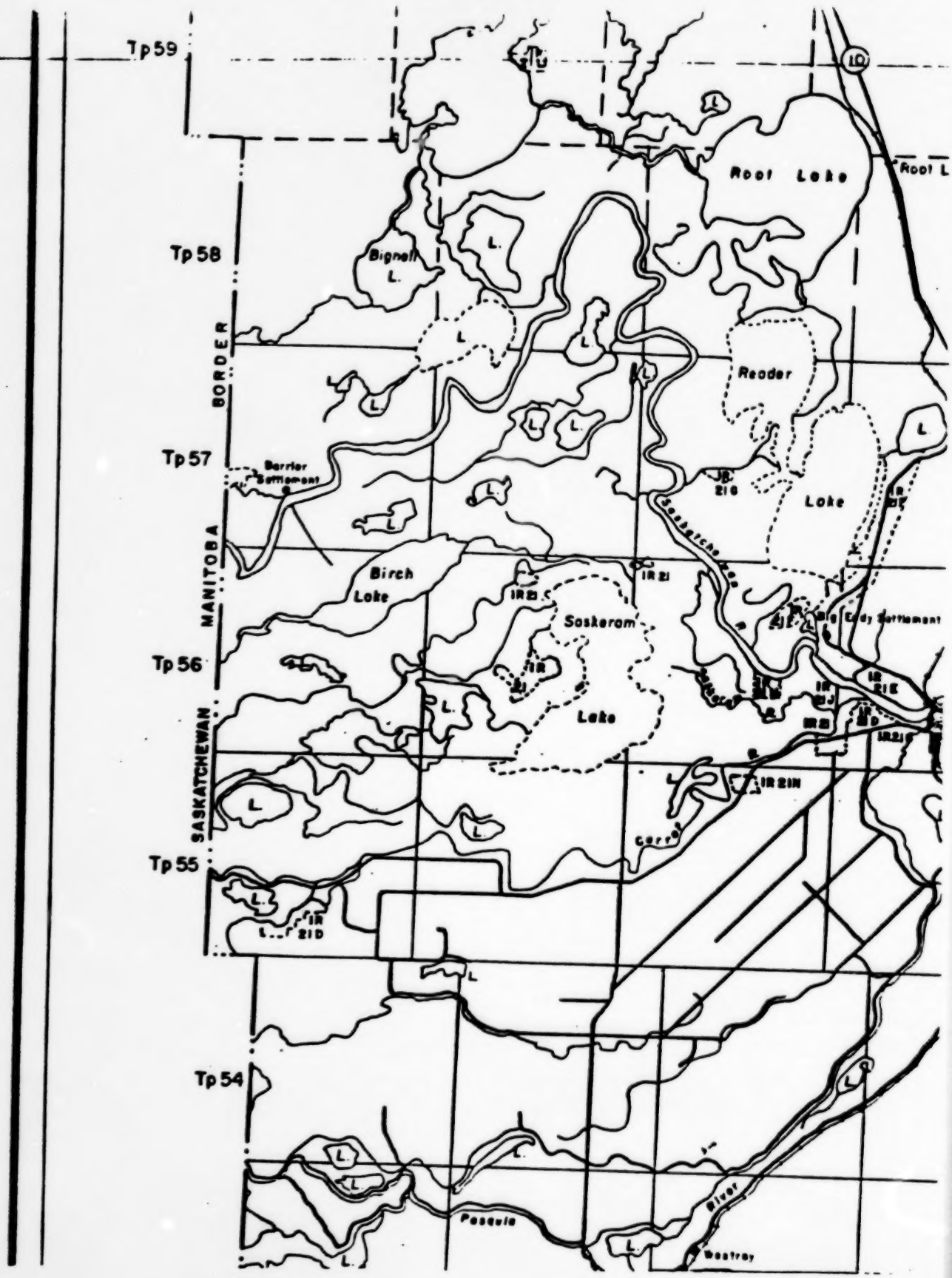
HUNTER INTERVIEWS: Resident: _____ Non Resident: _____

MILEAGE: Truck: _____ Other: _____

AREA SURVEYED:

COMMENTS:

GHA 6A (Map on reverse)


Tp 59
Tp 58
Tp 57
Tp 56
Tp 55
Tp 54
BORDER
MANITOBA
SASKATCHEWAN
Root Lake
Root L
Bignell L.
Reader
Lake
Barrier Settlement
Birch Lake
Saskeram
Lake
IR 21
IR 21B
IR 21D
IR 21N
Carrot
Pasquia
Pasquia River
Westray

COST OF SURVEY

Total man days = 29 (September 9 - October 18)

Total manpower costs	$1,934.82
Mileage @ 20¢	$1,898.00
Bag Meal Expense	$ 318.00
Total cost of survey	$4,150.82